

CHAPTER III

EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the researcher explores the history and development of traditional American family and Kath Weston's concept of chosen family as main theory, to discuss the extrinsic elements of this research.

3.1. American Family

3.1.1. Traditional American Family

In the 1950s, the traditional family model in the United States generally referred to a nuclear family structure consisting of a father as the primary breadwinner, a mother responsible for managing the household, and their children living under the same roof. This concept not only reflected the dominant social norms at the time, but was also regarded as a symbol of post-World War II social and economic prosperity. Stephanie Coontz (1992) states that:

The dominant image of the traditional American family a breadwinning father, homemaker mother, and their biological children was largely a product of post-World War II economic prosperity and mass media idealization (Coontz, 1992:36).

In other words, this idealistic image was heavily influenced by the economic growth and media of the time, which promoted a stable family as a universal standard.

Over time, this family structure started to change in major ways. One of the key reasons was the increasing participation of women in the workforce and higher education, which had influenced gender roles within the household.

As Andrew J. Cherlin (2009) notes that:

As women entered the workforce in increasing numbers, the structure and dynamics of American families underwent profound change (Cherlin, 2009:5).

This change questioned the traditional division of labor between men and women that used to support the typical family structure. It also brought changes in how people share caregiving, parenting, and partnership roles.

According to data from the Pew Research Center, the number of traditional families has decreased. In 1970, approximately 67% of American adults aged 25 to 49 lived with a spouse and their children. However, by 2023, this number had dropped to only 37%, signaling that what was once considered the standard family structure now represents only a small percentage of the social reality (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Lastly, these changes show a deeper change in how Americans understand and build family life. What was once considered common is now only one among many forms of family. As society becomes more diverse, new examples of kinship have appeared that reflect the realities of people today. One of these is the concept of the chosen family, a term that describes a group of people who support each other emotionally, even if they're not related by blood or law. This concept will be further explored in the following section, as it helps explain how many families work today beyond the old definitions.

3.2. Chosen Family by Kath Weston

In her book *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Kath Weston (1991) introduces the concept of chosen family, which refers to supportive networks built through voluntary bonds instead of biological or legal ties. This

concept formed as a response to the social rejection experienced by many LGBTQ+ individuals, who were often being disowned by their biological families due to their sexual or gender identities. In this context, chosen families function as vital systems of care and belonging, based on mutual support, trust, and affection. As Weston (1991) states, “Families of choice are those chosen rather than given by biology or law, emerging in particular among LGBTQ+ communities as alternatives to family structures that have rejected them” (Weston, 1991:105).

Moreover, the growth of chosen family reflects a larger change in public understandings of kinship, especially in the postmodern era where fixed definitions of family have become increasingly outdated. In relation to this, Philip N. Cohen (2015) states that “There is no longer a single dominant family form in America. Diversity has become the norm” (Cohen, 2015:12), highlighting the growing acceptance of non-traditional family structures. Thus, chosen family is not only a coping mechanism against discrimination, but also offer a new way to think about belonging, care, and responsibility outside of biological ties. This theoretical framework is important in understanding how present narratives such as those depicted in films represent kinship beyond blood and emotional support.

3.2.1. Kinship Beyond Blood in Chosen Family

Kath Weston’s concept of chosen family introduces the idea that kinship does not have to come from blood ties or legal status, but can instead be built through mutual care and emotional connection. This challenges the common belief that families must be formed through biology or marriage. In many cases, chosen families are formed as a result of situations where individuals do not feel supported

or accepted in their biological families. These relationships, while not biologically or legally recognized, are as important and significant as those formed through relations, if not more. Weston (1991) states, “people who were not kin by blood or marriage could be defined as such by the participants in a relationship, and it was through everyday practices that such definitions became real” (Weston, 1991:40).

This idea of kinship beyond blood shows that people have the power to build their own families based on shared experiences, mutual care, and emotional support. Many people see chosen family is not simply a substitute for traditional family but a more real and meaningful. This shift towards inclusive kinship actions reflects the wider social trend toward diversity and the acceptance that families can take many forms other than the traditional family model. In the context of modern American families, these chosen families provide an alternative that puts personal choice and emotional bonds over traditional relationships.

3.2.2. The Role of Emotional Support in Chosen Families

In chosen families, emotional support is not just an added benefit but rather the foundation of their existence. Emotional support becomes important for people who face isolation or rejection from their biological families. These families are formed not only from shared experiences of hardship and survival but also from deep emotional connections that form through mutual care, understanding, and acceptance. Weston (1991) states that the “daily labor of love” within chosen families requires experiencing emotional engagement, caregiving, and collective responsibility (Weston, 1991:115). This emotional commitment support relationships that are far more lasting and meaningful than those that might exist in

traditional family structures, which are often bound to responsibilities tied to bloodlines or legal ties.

The emotional support provided by chosen families creates a safe environment where individuals can be themselves without fear of rejection. Unlike traditional families, where relationships can be shaped by social acceptance and familial responsibilities, chosen families are built on unconditional support, where each member is valued for who they are, not for their genetic or legal connection.